

*Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.* - Albert Einstein

The purpose of valid and effective assessment is to provide students with feedback regarding their progress, with the goal of increasing student learning. Just as each student is unique, so are their individual preferences, academic strengths and learning methods. Not all forms of assessment are equally effectual for all students, and it is therefore our responsibility as teachers to develop and carry out varied and reliable methods of evaluation that cater to the individuality of students. Assessment must be differentiated in order to ensure that diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences are considered and recognized. In this way, we can encourage and contribute to our students' overall educational process.

Three methods of assessment that should be used in the classroom are diagnostic, formative and summative. The purpose of diagnostic assessment is to determine how we will plan, teach, assess and evaluate. Formative assessment takes place throughout a unit of learning, and it is used to direct instruction while it is still in the process of being carried out. Finally, summative assessment is used at the end of a learning unit to determine how much students have learned and whether or not the instruction was successful in serving its purpose.

When preparing an assessment, we as teachers must identify the skills and information that we expect students to have learned from our instruction. If a test or assessment is to be a valid and reliable indication of what students have actually learned, we must ensure that there is a proper alignment between instruction and evaluation.

The type of assessment that is decided upon will depend on the outcome being evaluated and assessed. Assessments should firstly be used to check for prior or background knowledge, in order to determine what students already know. Assessment is also used to highlight strengths and weaknesses in teacher instructional practice, so that we as teachers can improve our practices and collaborate with our peers and professional counterparts in order to learn from them. Assessment can also pinpoint students who require more time and additional support before moving on to the next learning outcomes. For those students who have demonstrated proficiency, assessment can also be used as a supplementary method by which they can show what they have learned through additional enrichment activities.

Teachers must establish, maintain and increase optimism regarding assessment. Many students experience stress or anxiety at the mere thought of being tested or assessed, which can negatively affect their performance and thus their scores and grades. We must support and encourage students, in order to decrease anxiety levels and to help students develop an attitude of effort attribution, whereby they will work hard due to the belief that this will bring them success.

With as much frequency as possible, assessment should draw on students' ability to use the higher-level thinking skills of Bloom's cognitive domain, such as application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In this way, students are able to effectively demonstrate that they have a true grasp of the subject material, beyond simply understanding and recalling it.

In order to be effective, assessment should be carried out on a regular basis, and it should clearly communicate to students the rate at which they are progressing and the areas where they still require improvement. In this way, student learning will be maximized. It is therefore a primary and fundamental goal to ensure that students are provided with valid and reliable assessment.